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Jefferson Medical College
Introductory addresses
Oct. 12, 1859.

INTRODUCTORY LECTURE

TO THE COURSE ON

MIDWIFERY, AND DISEASES OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN,

IN

JEFFERSON MEDICAL COLLEGE,

Delivered October 12, 1859.

BY

CHARLES D. MEIGS, M. D.

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PUBLISHED BY THE CLASS.

PHILADELPHIA:
JOSEPH M. WILSON,
No. 111 SOUTH TENTH STREET, BELOW CHESTNUT.
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CORRESPONDENCE.

JEFFERSON MEDICAL COLLEGE,
PHILADELPHIA, October 18, 1859.

PROF. CHARLES D. MEIGS:—

DEAR SIR: At a meeting of the Students of Jefferson Medical College, held October 17, 1859, Mr. T. F. Lee, of Alabama, being called to the chair, and Mr. J. A. Butts, of Georgia, appointed secretary. On motion of Mr. N. J. Thompson, of Alabama, the following resolution was read and unanimously adopted:—

Resolved, That a committee of six be appointed to wait on Dr. Charles D. Meigs, and request a copy of his Introductory Lecture for publication.

We, the undersigned committee, appointed under the above resolution, take great pleasure in performing the agreeable duty assigned us, and most respectfully ask permission to publish your eloquent and interesting address. With the hope that you will grant the request of the Class, we beg leave to subscribe ourselves, respectfully and truly,

Your most obedient servants,

N. J. THOMPSON, Alabama,
J. H. RYLAND, Mississippi,
Dr. C. H. BENTON, Kentucky,
G. W. THOMAS, Georgia,
J. W. MCILHANY, Virginia,
FRED. TAYLOR, New York,
Committee.

1208 WALNUT STREET,
October 18, 1859.

GENTLEMEN:—

I am grateful to the Class for the favor of their approbation as to my Introductory Lecture, and I take great pleasure in submitting the manuscript to their disposal.

Please assure the Class of my most grateful appreciation of the kindness, and for yourselves accept assurances of my sincere respect.

CH. D. MEIGS.

To Messrs.

N. J. THOMPSON, Alabama,
J. H. RYLAND, Mississippi,
Dr. C. H. BENTON, Kentucky,
G. W. THOMAS, Georgia,
J. W. MCILHANY, Virginia,
FRED. TAYLOR, New York,
Committee.

INTRODUCTORY LECTURE.

GENTLEMEN:—

We are met to-night to open the annual course of lectures on Midwifery, and on the Diseases of Women and Children, which I was elected, many years ago, to deliver in this college—and I seize with a real, unaffected pleasure, the earliest opportunity to tender to the members of my class assurances of my respect for their motives, and my sincere wishes and confident hope that they may individually and generally find their patient labors here not without a due reward of improvement, and not without many pleasing reflections and convictions as to their daily progress in medical knowledge.

I stand here now pledged to you, to my colleagues, to the Trustees of this institution who allow me the privilege and the honor of thus publicly addressing you, as well as the whole profession in America, to do all that in me lies to fulfil a duty the most sacred, regarded as to its influence upon the minds of those to whom will soon be intrusted most important sanitary interests in extensive portions of our common country.

I am strongly induced to exert myself to the utmost

in this cause, as being one in which I have for half a century had a large concern; and because I feel the profoundest sense of obligation to carefully teach and fully instruct those on whose proficiency in learning, and on whose claims to admission into the class of physicians I shall be obliged to cast my vote. It should, I conceive, be an incurable wound to any man's conscience to refuse the meed of approbation to persons whom he neither could nor would instruct with precision and clearness. If I teach you not aright then, let the blame ever attach to me. But where shall it adhere if teaching you distinctly, particularly, carefully, and fully, any of you should retire discomfited in that struggle; a struggle in which victory often leads to great success, and where defeat draws on mortification and a discouragement which, sometimes, tells on the whole subsequent life of the contestant.

If my conscience ought to bleed for unjustly opposing a bar to your hopes, it should be null indeed to make me refrain from obeying the convictions of duty on the occasions in question.

The long course of time, gentlemen, that lies drawn out before us, in this hall, gives promise of ample leisure to carefully examine, and accurately learn, most of the important particulars of the science of obstetricy and the art of midwifery that you and I are proposing here to study in concert; so that, if those pursuits should hold out to the appointed end of the course, we shall have examined and mastered many problems of the highest import to you, as to your future ability and success in this career, and of *interest* the very gravest

to the people—and at the same time highly stimulating and gratifying to your philosophical curiosity.

Many of you already do know, and I could wish every gentleman of the class to know that, if we were now met for the *purpose* merely to study and learn what is called *midwifery*, our sessions would very soon reach their close, since no intelligent student could, *I think*, fail, early to master all the problems and rules belonging to a mere *art-manual*, a *skill*, a *dexterousness*, a TRICK of the hand; and since multitudes of men and women too, to the last degree unlettered, gross, and ignorant, have learned to be dexterous as accoucheurs, from the times of the Phuas and Shiphras of old, which in them was a mere prestidigitation or *legerdemain*.

Yet, while midwifery is not a science, but an *art*, *pure* and *simple*, it is an ART bearing upon concerns of such vital interest to both individuals and the state, that the exercise of it ought never to be deemed safe except by the hands of persons duly educated and even learned in the science that expounds the phenomena and laws under which it becomes safe and beneficent.

It is in the studies of *obstetricy*, therefore, that you will become Masters of the Art, and *so*, be received as safe and trustworthy practitioners of midwifery. To prove how just are these opinions, it is necessary only to pause for an instant of time and scan the present state of the colleges and universities throughout the world wherein this department is held equal in importance with the highest of the practical branches of medicine.

This appears to me to be a happy change, for, when the now venerable University of Pennsylvania, who, as being to me an *Alma Mater*, receiving me and honoring me as one among her many sons, will ever deserve my veneration and respect—when that university, I say, was first established, nearly one hundred years ago, the Chair of Midwifery was attached to the Professorship of Anatomy, and the learned Dr. Shippen found time to give only seven lectures in all upon this our department in medicine; and such was the preparation of medical students in that early day, and *so prepared* were they sent forth from the Halls of Instruction to take charge of the most *desperate cases*, to which *alone*, as the *general* rule, they were then accustomed to be summoned—the conduct of the *Lying-in* being, for the *most part*, throughout our country, confided to ignorant though *adept* women.

This state of things long ago ceased, and the range of attainments now considered to be indispensable to the securing of public confidence, and to the satisfying of the voice of conscience in every practitioner's breast has been greatly prolonged and highly elevated.

For one hundred years past, and particularly within the past fifty years, obstetricy has made the most remarkable progress, and has at length taken its place in equal rank with the highest *avocations* and *scientific thoughts* of medical men.

Having during a large portion of my now long professional life, occupied a literary as well as a practical position, I was led to make myself somewhat familiar with the scientific as well as the *method-notions* of the

ancient and the earlier *modern* writers and teachers with a view to the clearer comprehension of the modern aspects of our department. From these studies, which enabled me to compare the condition of obstetricy and midwifery in their various epochs, I have seen that the time, the labor, and the talent that were employed by illustrious men in the investigation of embryology of gestation and parturition, the circumstances of the lying-in, and the peculiar characteristics of the sex, their diseases and accidents, have at last established our department of obstetricy upon foundations so solid and *broad* as to make it, what it must *ever* hereafter remain, a specialty in science and art as *marked* as that of the surgeon, and embracing a sphere as large as that of the institutes and practice, with which it may, without a paradox, be said to be one, and yet trenchantly divided from both.

It is for the purpose of studying these complex and grave questions in science and art that you are now assembled, and *that* with the reasonable expectation of so accomplishing your education, as to enable you to apply these informations in *executive acts*, to be the future sources of competency or even wealth; of the public respect and complacency, and for some—*haply*, of a lasting fame. I believe that these good things are within your reach, gentlemen, for I do believe that my colleagues are men in the highest degree competent to their work, and filled with earnest wishes for your success, if not the honor and fame of this seat of medical teachings, with which their good name is allied. May this college prove to every man of you, no careless

nurse—no cruel step-mother, but in the truest sense, an Alma Mater—training you up in principles of conduct, and inducting you in ways of thought, so good and so *just* and *wise*, that you shall never hereafter depart from them. You never *will*—gentlemen, you never *can* depart from them if you prove *true* to yourselves—*true* to your loving friends and kindred, whose happiness, whose peace of mind and complacency in life, are inextricably interwoven with your honor and prosperity—true to the bright mistress, the cynosure of your eyes—true to the faithful wife of your bosom, that is to be—true to the fond children of your care, who shall gather about you, and *answering* as face answereth to a *face* in the *glass*—*true* to the honor and fame, and the eminency of your *manly* sons and your *queenly daughters*—*true* to your *country*—*true* to the *God* that made you and *upholds* your being and your life!

What answer will you make to these sentiments?

Let no man in *America* defile his own blood—let every American man strain all his powers to acquire or to maintain the honor of his line, for the blood of his father and the life of his mother live in his veins. Shall a man spit on his mother's grave!

Now, young *gentlemen*, my *opinions*, my *convictions*, as to this branch of medicine, set it up so high, that I am neither ashamed nor afraid to invite you to become partakers with me and with my brethren in America and throughout the world, of those chances for fortune and honor, which the profession presents to every true hearted student—and I do know *this* very *day* and *hour*, that *if* you will fail—the fault will be *yours;* for

a *man*—that *is* a *man*—I speak *not of a fool!* can do in this world of ours, very nearly, if not exactly, what he wills to do. There are diamonds and gems in the path. Trample them not as pebbles.

I invite you to this vocation, as one presenting the means of doing great good to your fellow creatures. I invite you to come in and work along with the benevolent and learned physicians, and the educated brave surgeons of America—to go out with them into the haunts of misery and pain, and where the fear of death and its *expectation* are ruling—and, like heaven's ministers, bear messages of consolation and hope, and through a knowledge and a power nearly akin to the *miraculous*, burst asunder the bonds that lead men *down* to death; giving *strength* for weakness, *joy* for horror and dismay, and the *sweetest* complacency and tranquillity, where ~~was~~ *woe indescribable* and *pain inexorable*, but for your intervention! Of a truth the Prince of Physicians spoke out right well when he exclaimed, "A philosophical physician is in manner a god."

ιητροσ γαρ φιλοσφοσ ισοθεοσ.

"Happy is the man that findeth wisdom and the man that getteth understanding. For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more *precious* than rubies, and all the things thou canst desire are not to be *compared* unto her. Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left hand, riches and honor. Her ways, are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." I invite you hither, gentlemen, where, however, it is not

meet for you to be found, unless willing and capable to become both learned and wise—*learned* in all the sciences and art of the physician, and *wise* to act out your mission in the world, *becomingly*, with *decency*, *gentleness*, *faithfulness*, *prudently*, *politely*, *fairly*, *honestly*, and in all charitableness! so *that* in thought, in word, and in *deed*, you show yourselves worthy of this high vocation to which you are being called to-day. You *must* become learned. The obstetrician should be pre-eminent, both as physician and surgeon. But if the physician must be either learned or *contemptible*, and if the surgeon must be an *educated man* elaborately polished, drilled and disciplined to his *dreadful business*, how with the obstetrician! like *them*, *he* must be a *master* of life, and filled with the knowledge of that anatomy, physiology, and pathology, that have become established as facts, as principles, and as laws, by the slow marches of the sciences from the beginning of human civilizations until now. And yet more than them, he must know all the peculiar and delicate crasis of the female—all those mysterious laws that enable her by their power, to become the mother of mankind—impress upon her sensitive organism a temperament and a *morale*, that makes her the *so lovable*, the *so confiding*, *so faithful*, *so teaching companion* of man *who*, but for her gentle training and her *soft and sweet seduction* into the paths of virtue and wisdom, would early lapse back into his original state, a brute more cruel than the tiger—craftier than the fox, and more to be dreaded than the lordly lion. It is a task without end that you have now begun; but though you can never work it out unto perfection, it is

one so full of beneficence, so gratifying to the insatiate desire for knowledge, so ennobling to the soul of him who performs his task aright, that I gladly hail your adhesion to the cause, and joyfully hope that you will both honor the cause and yourselves, by *your* most true and hearty co-operation.

The ambition to excel, a love of distinction, or the hope of lasting fame, is with some the moving cause of your meeting in this place. Is it fame that you seek for in thus connecting yourself with labors of the physicians of the world?

"How hard it is to climb the steep where fame's proud temple shines afar!" Think that, among the thousands, nay, the millions of men who like us in all ages have lived out their lives of self-abnegation and unceasing toil—what a vast proportion of them forever sleep—

"Where *all* the dead *forgotten* lie!"

Like you, young gentlemen, when the morning of life dawned, they hailed the hope that beamed down from the high places of human excellence and honor, and now, not one trace, no shadow of a shade is left among mankind of their life or of their death—not more than remains of the troups of insects that busily danced in yesterday's evening beam. They are clean sunk down out of sight and out of knowledge in the dark eclipse of time that hides so many myriads.

Is it fame that you long for? What is fame, and the worth of it? Utter the name of Hippocrates, pronounce the words Erasistratus, or Celsus, or Paul. The sounds of your voice can transport us to Cos or to Tha-

sos, to Alexandria, with its museums and its libraries, its logicians and dreamers and sages, or they may carry us amid the populous throngs of the mistress of the world, or bring up before the imagination Ægina's peaceful bay and its surrounding hills and temples and towers. They awaken the idea of an epoch, or revive the memory of words written, or they open up a drama of politics; of social, artistic, commercial, æsthetic, and inner life of peoples and places; but of the men themselves, we can form no conception, of who they were, or what they were, as to their personality, their identity, for the light they kindled consumed *them* utterly when they died in the *blaze* of their fame, and now we have only an abstract, a schematic idea of them.

Among the thousands of illustrious names of men and women of Greece and Rome, that swarm in the great scenes of classical biography and history, a bare fifty-two of them, celebrated for virtue, for talents, or by their vices and crimes, have been transmitted to the present age by history, by medal and bust, or by *statues* in marble or bronze. These alone, out of the myriads who engaged in the tumultuous struggle for wealth, power, and fame, these are they whom we truly know.

If you utter the names of Confucius, or Zoroaster, or Solon, or Pythagoras, they are but empty sounds, significant not of persons, but principles, not men, but events or periods. How will you discriminate betwixt Solon and Solon's slave, between Pythagoras and the least of his disciples? They have become myths; they long ago ceased to be men.

Is this fame?

But if you would recall the countenance, the form, the port of Augustus, or Tiberius, or Vespasian, or Trajan's; if you would summon from the remote clouds and mist of time, the very persons of Livia and Julia or Agrippina, or Plotina, or Sabina, you have but to close the ears and eyes, that they may stand out before the view as they were, and as they are in form, in beauty, in vice; in misfortune, in action and sentiment; for their whole physical as well as their æsthetic constitution and life, is, so to say, photographed upon all time by the historian, the biographer and the sculptor. They are as much known as the Iron Duke. Would they were so beloved as Washington. And *this is* fame, to live in the life of all ages, to be seen and known forever and everywhere, as a living acting part of our so perishing mortality.

> "How hard it is to climb the steep,
> Where fame's proud temple shines afar!"

Let me ejaculate the names of Moses, or Joshua, which fall from the lips of every Christian man; or Saul, or David, or Naomi, or Ruth's name! I utter the merely vocal symbols of political wisdom and fiery warrior zeal, or the blended notion of envy and jealousy, religious longings and ecstacies, or the immortal fidelity of love and friendship that forever lives in the beautiful words: "Bid me neither leave thee, nor forsake thee; for whither thou goest thither also will I go; where thou abidest there will I also abide; thy *people* shall be *my* people, and thy God shall be my God."

As to the lawgiver; as to the warrior; as to the king

and the maiden—their individuality and personality have forever disappeared from the world; their name is become an empty sound, while their lives, sentiments, and actions are left to immortality; the ideal is here, but the real is forever hidden from our eyes.

Nevertheless, the love of approbation or the desire for a great and good name is the beginning of virtue, and I fondly hope that the members of my class may cherish the love of fame to that degree as to spur them onwards, and ever faster and farther in the race for distinction. Such a sentiment is both cause and guaranty of industry and success, for it puts a man into earnest.

What men strongly wish for they strongly hope for, and hope leads to strenuous endeavor to achieve the highest summits of excellence.

If you will be physicians of fame, then your endeavors will all be in the right path—you must be men of liberal education. To use the pleasing language of an elegant author, I will repeat from Mr. Sharon Turner's history of the Saxons, that "To be intelligent is even more necessary than to be affluent, because mind has become the invisible sovereign of the world; and *they* who *cultivate* its progress, being diffused everywhere in society, are the real tutors of the human race; *they* dictate the opinions, THEY fashion the conduct of all men. To be illiterate or to be imbecile in this illumined day, is to be despised and trodden down in that tumultuous struggle for wealth, power, or reputation, in which every individual is too eagerly conflicting."

If this sentiment of Mr. Turner's is just, as to the

affairs of men in general society, how eminently is it just as relative to the liberal and philosophical pursuits of medical men whose whole mission is rather æsthetic than physical—more truly cleric than laic!

But after all—if we come back to the contemplation of the sober realities of life, we must find that this battle of life has but one victory, and that it is fought in the hope of happiness—for happiness is the aim and hoped-for end of all endeavor.

If we could but know where happiness dwells! or even that it is twofold in its nature—the one vain, deceiving, treacherous—the other solid, convincing, and undecaying—ever augmenting; the one sensuous and brutal—the other intellectual and moral—and the problem in both locked up in the theory of agreeable sensations. But, if agreeable sensations do await upon sensual indulgences, such happiness is transitory—it never continues in one long stay, and is soon succeeded by apathy or disgust, and leads to sin and shame and undying remorse.

But the happiness that springs from the cultivation of the moral faculties and the expansion of man's intellectual sphere, is both satisfying and perennial—it discloses the sweet springs and fountain of joy, and leads to happier stars in uniting the soul to its Creator whom it discloses as the object of trust, of love, and sincere adoration. How can it be not so—since the illimitable universe is the field of it, in which man ever grasps at the infinite with insatiable desire to know all things, prove all things, and hold fast to that which is good.

This wide domain of philosophy is yours. How charming is divine philosophy, as Milton sings—

> Not harsh and crabbed, as dull fools suppose,
> But musical as is Apollo's lute;
> And a perpetual feast of nectar'd sweets,
> Where no crude surfeit reigns.

If, as I have said, the illimitable universe is the field in which the philosophic mind loves to rove, seeking on every hand where it may thrust outwards the circling horizon that, as a misty veil, bars it from the bright immense infinitude beyond—it ever finds (*within*) mysteries, physical and moral, the solution of which it inexpressibly desires and hopes for. The laws of life and mind are the problems set before it—never perhaps to be truly conceived of by the young, nor understood by any man, until he comes to that hour in which he is ready to exclaim—

> "The world recedes—it disappears;
> Heaven opens on my eyes, my ears
> With sounds seraphic ring;
> Lend—lend your wings—
> I mount—I fly—Oh grave,
> Where is thy victory!"

Read Socrates' plea for his life—read Plato's Phædon. Be just to yourselves—be true to your friends, and you will find that *justum et tenacem propositi virum, non eget Mauri jaculis, neque arcû*, and that in this world there is nothing that can harm a man whose walk is in virtue's path.

Gentlemen—shall *we* hope for happiness? *Let* us *then*, with the sincerity, the learning and the wisdom of

the *real* physician, *let us* one and *all* devote our lives to the investigation of man's nature, that we may heal *his* wounds and *cure* his sicknesses; and man's destiny; that we may by our good example show him that virtue contains in herself her truest and richest reward, and that "virtue can see to do what virtue would by her own radiant light—though sun and moon were in the flat sea sunk."—*Comus.*

If the sentiments I have now expressed should receive the approbation of the students of my class, I fervently hope that they will with me come to the conclusion that they stand here to-night as persons under bonds to universal humanity to avoid during their student-life—and in maturer age *as well*—every impropriety, all unmanly levity as dishonoring the perpetrator, and insulting to the entire class of them among whom he enters—saluting them as fellow-students, and designing to be co-workers with them.

As the whole season is before us, I shall not here speak to you on the proper subject of midwifery—I prefer to request your attention to some suggestions as to the method of attending my lectures here—for it is for that end that you have presented yourselves as students of obstetricy.

What I have to ask of you is that you meet me regularly—as I now promise to meet you with the greatest regularity at the appointed hour. I care not how much you may read upon my branch during this session, for I hold myself responsible for the correct instruction of every man who shall attend to what I say and to what I shall present as a means of explana-

tion or illustration. I expect to go over the whole subject, and to do it earnestly and affectionately; and I conceive that if I am not capable of setting the whole matter before you in clear order, method, and full detail, I ought not to be here—and should not have been left here so long.

If you had wanted the aid of books alone, you might have staid at home, and laid out in the purchase of good treatises, the large sums that journeys and residence must demand. But you did not come here to read books, but to hear certain men expound and explain those doctrines and arts that it behooves the student to know.

If you have a text-book upon my branch, or any book that comprises a modern statement of the whole matter between us, it will be both useful and pleasing to peruse such pages of your volume as may relate to the lecture of each consecutive day. This you must do much more extensively as to some of the other branches, which I think you will find to be not only more difficult of comprehension than mine, but as consisting of an infinitude of items, and as demanding processes of very minute analysis, require all the mnemonic aids that you could draw from texts and from notes.

I shall have three things to teach you, and but three —if I except an appendix. Those three things are—

I. The pelvis.

II. The soft parts.

III. The embryogeny.

With the appendix, which concerns—

IV. The newborn child.

Or, if you prefer it, let the course be announced as Lectures on—

I. The anatomy of the parts concerned in the acts of reproduction.

II. The physiology of reproduction.

III. The therapeutics and surgery of obstetrics and midwifery.

IV. The history and the diseases of the newborn child. That's all.

Do you see that it would be most useful and most natural, when treating of the anatomy of the parts concerned in the acts of reproduction, to point out the pathological anatomy—*i. e.*, describe the diseases and accidents to which such parts are liable, and point out the mode of treating them—and, if that is a good method, then it is an equally good one in our studies concerning the physiology of reproduction, to indicate not only the processes of embryogeny, but its deviations and faulty states, and so we shall have examined the diseases of women—except those peculiar to labor and the lying-in state, which will be considered in the IIId class, which is the therapeutics and surgery of obstetricy and of midwifery—in which the whole account of the Art, and a detailed view of the disorders that are observed in the exercise of it, shall be carefully presented and explained before you.

Last of all, in the IVth class will come an account of the diseases of children, and so make an end—as I now beg to make an end, after thanking you for your kind attention this evening.

Dec. 4, 1859.